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Dylan on tour: Family reunion of the old, new folk

UPI

Joan Baez and Bob Dylan during one of the Rolling Thunder concerts.

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

It's news whenever Bob Dylan decides to perform, but his Rolling Thunder Revue, which hit the Forum last night, was extra special.

The show has brought the folk-rock idol together with many of the singers who figured in the earlier years of his career.

He shares the stage with Joan Baez, queen of the folk music boom of the early 1960s, with whom he was very close; Roger McGuinn, leader of the Byrds, the group that made Mr. Tambourine Man his first number one folk-rock hit a decade ago; Rambling Jack Elliott, the protege of the late Woody Gutherie (whom Dylan visited in hospital when he first hit New York city in 1960); and Bobby Neuwrith, his former road manager and now signing leader of the current backup group.

The tour has also attracted several guest artists, including two of the most prominent of Dylan's "songwriting children" — Canadians Joni Mitchell and Gordie Lightfoot, both of whom were to play last night.

Rolling Thunder Revue started out five weeks ago, the artists travelling aboard five buses, and minimum advertising preceeding each stop. The Forum show was the second to last date of the tour, which finishes in Madison Square Garden later this week.

Originally planned to embrace small halls, to invoke a closer-to-the-people feeling, Rolling Thunder has barged its way into the larger arenas, primarily to cover the expenses of the tour. But as Baez mentioned in a telephone interview with CHOM-FM yesterday, "The same family feeling still gets across to the big audiences."

The idea for the reunion came to Dylan during the summer when he resurfaced on the New York club scene — signing, jamming and drinking with his old cronies. He obviously feels in fine form, after a long reclusive period following his 1966 motorcycle accident which last year was broken by a triumphant return tour with The Band.

The tour is the capper to perhaps the most successful year of the 34-year-old singer's career.

He began by releasing his best album in ages (perhaps the best of all), Blood On The Tracks, a move away from his recent mellow pensees to a finely honed but firey intensity. During the summer, he officially released his legendary Basement Tapes, a glowingly edited packaged of inspired home performances done immediately after his accident.

The jewel of this tour is a new song, entitled Hurricane, a blistering protest against the alleged frame-up on a murder charge of prize-fighter Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter in 1966.

JEWEL

The song is more than a "return" to the social-consciousness of his folk years. Dylan was always the best "protest" writer because he described real-life situations (instead of slogans) in songs that are just as vivid today. But Hurricane is clearly one of the most compleat he's written.

The disc also debunks the myth that Dylan is not a "great recording artist."

This is a charged performance: An eerie east-European violin strain dots the galloping pace established by slashing drum cymbals and congas. He combines an amazingly detailed and atmospheric narrative on the circumstances surrounding Carter's conviction, as well as underlining the larger moral issues. He sings as a troubadour, with information that is not only of the moment but also universal.

Dylan doesn't join party, but the Thunder rolls on

By MIKE REGENSTREIF
for The Gazette

Bob Dylan didn't make it to the Rolling Thunder Revue party after it opened in Toronto earlier this week.

But all the other performers did. I went too — not as a journalist but as a guest of one of the performers — and got a better insight into the singers' off-stage personalities.

The Rolling Thunder Revue is of course an assemblage — which appears in Montreal tonight — including Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Ramblin' Jack Elliot, Bobby Neuwirth, Joni Mitchell, Roger McGuinn and Ronney Blakely. Also along is a host of back-up musicians including Scarlett Riviera, Mick Ronson, Rob Stoner, T-Bone Burnett and Allan Ginsburg as poet-in-residence.

Dylan, it seems, is keeping aloof from the rest of the touring tribe. Whereas some like Baez and Mitchell have wandered among the audiences, Dylan has sealed himself off from not only his public but most of his fellow performers.

Ramblin' Jack said he's hardly had a chance to talk with the tour's main star.

HOME BOY

A bunch of Toronto's folk and rock personalities also turned up at the party: Gordon Lightfoot, Rompin' Ronnie Hawkins, David Clayton-Thomas, Christopher Kearney and David Rea.

It was an interesting and very friendly party. During the concert Joan Baez dedicated a song to Montreal songwriter Jesse Winchester — and at the party Jesse and his music formed the basis for an enjoyable chat I had with the 'queen of folk music.'

Despite his reputation as one of rock's nasties, Roger McGuinn, founder and leader of the Byrds, seemed to be a very likable guy. Wearing a Sweetheart of the Rodeo cowboy shirt Roger wandered throughout the suite engaging in conversation with anyone.

Joni Mitchell was the elegant lady at the affair. In a very happy frame of mind, she wandered about chatting and distributing cigarettes to one and all.

Ramblin' Jack Elliott was forever ramblin' about big semis, cowboy hats and boots and driving cattle out on Ian Tyson's ranch.

Holding court in a corner was Allen Ginsburg. He had no shortage of people to listen to his tales of contemporaries such as Jack Kerouac and seemed genuinely interested in meeting those who cared to introduce themselves.

In all, no one seemed to even care that Dylan had shunned the party. They all had a real nice time without him.

Syncopated sinners beware: It's that old devil rock music

By MIKE ROYKO
Chicago Daily News

Mike Royko, the Chicago Daily News' Pulitzer-winning columnist, sometimes turns to music when he's not writing about politics or Mayor Richard Daley.

CHICAGO — Because of my interest in rock music, the following news item out of Tallahassee, Fla., caught my eye:

TALLAHASSEE — Damning rock music for its "appeal to the flesh," a Baptist church has began a campaign to put the torch to records by Elton John, the Rolling Stones and other rock stars.

Some $2,200 worth of records were tossed into a bonfire this week after church officials labeled the music immoral.

The Rev. Charles Boykin, associate pastor and youth director at the Lakewood Baptist Church, said he had seen statistics which showed "of 1,000 girls who became pregnant out of wedlock, 986 committed fornication while rock music was being played."

It was the last part — the amazing statistic — that intrigued me. I considered getting a portable radio and blasting rock music at the first 1,000 women I met.

But first I decided to get further details from Rev. Boykin. I phoned him and we had the following interview:

Where did that statistic come from, the one about all those girls getting pregnant while listening to rock music?

Accurate

"I want to be accurate, so let me correct you. They didn't all listen to it DURING the sex act. I was speaking of listening to it as a prelude to fornication, as well as during."

I see. But rock music was involved in all but 14 pregnancies out of 1,000 cases?

"That's right. It was sort of like a Gallup Poll of unwed mothers."

And who provided the statistics?

"This man. He's from West Virginia. Or maybe Virginia. He stopped in our church one day and gave us the statistics."

He's a professional poll taker?

"Uh, no. He's an evangelist. He travels all the time."

And you believe his statistics?

Relationship

"Oh, yes. There's a definite relationship between illicit sex and any music with a syncopated beat. That covers rock and country music and even some Gospel music."

Goodness, a decent girl has got to walk around with earmuffs on. Tell me more.

"Well, the low bass tones of the bass drum and the bass guitar make people respond sexually."

(They make me put my fingers in my ears. Am I strange?)

But the syncopated beat has been around a lot longer than rock music, hasn't it?

"That's right. And the debauchery began when Benny Goodman introduced swing music."

Benny Goodman caused debauchery?

"That's right. His music had a syncopated beat."

Then why weren't lots of girls getting pregnant because of his music?

Open Sex

"They were, but it was covered up. When Goodman had a concert in Los Angeles in 1938, there was open sex."

In 1938?

"That's right. The syncopated beat did it."

How about Glen Miller, Lawrence Welk?

"When they use the syncopated beat, yes."

Remarkable. I wouldn't have thought Lawrence Welk capable of such rascality. It makes me wonder what really goes on in all those nursing homes.

"It doesn't matter whether a song is slow or fast. It is the syncopated beat. You can trace it all the way back to the jungle, where the beat was introduced. It is primitive, pulsating, hypnotic."

How alarming! Then what kind of music should a nice girl listen to if she doesn't want to be swept up by a jungle, animal instinct?

"Well, the syncopated beat is not predominant in patriotic songs or in most Gospel music."

Even Bach

How about classical music?

"I'm not advocating all classical music. In his later music, Bach introduced some syncopated beats."

Aha! I suspected as much of Bach. The old hipster fathered 20 children. Have you conducted any other scientific research, besides the Traveling Evangelist Poll?

"Well, we made some tests with plants. We played classical music for one group of plants, and rock music for another group, and we didn't play any music for a third group.

"The plants that were exposed to classical music grew in the direction of the speakers.

"The plants that weren't exposed to any music grew straight up."

And — let me guess — the plants that listened to rock music fornicated and all but 14 of the plants became pregnant, right?

"No, the plants that were exposed to rock music just grew away from the speakers. Then they died."

Well, that's better than breaking your daddy's heart.

Gzowski livens up CBC-FM

Radio&TV
by Joan Irwin

The most lively addition so far to the CBC's new English language FM network is Gzowski on FM, the weekday 4 to 6 p.m. magazine show focused on the arts — all of them, plus some unexpected additions.

The Gzowski show replaced a program called Divertimento, a soothing music series devoted to what's called "light classics." Divertimento fans were something less than enchanted with the replacement, especially since Gzowski seemed to go out of his way to shock them in his first show by interviewing a drag queen and allowing several four-letter words to get by in another interview.

Listener protest

It struck me at the time as a foolishly defiant gambit and a short-sighted approach to a new audience. There were protests from listeners all along the FM network and there are still some objections to the Gzowski show, especially from Montreal listeners.

But there are indications now that the show is gathering audience, and that's good because it's usually a very interesting couple of hours.

Gzowski on FM may contain anything from a half hour conversation with, say, Andre Gagnon or Kate Reid, to a waltz lesson, a profile of a poet or a chat with one-time skating star Barbara Ann Scott.

On Tuesdays there's a new segment called Tradio where people can trade old books, records, etc. On Friday there's the Battle of the Bands, today between The Canadians Brass and The York Winds.

But most of all there's that rare kind of ease and intimacy that Gzowski honed to a fine art as host of This Country In the Morning.

Informal broadcaster

For my money Gzowski is one of the finest informal broadcasters in the country. He talks to the microphone as if it were an old friend, though in a somewhat more restrained vocabulary than he normally uses off the air.

Gzowski has the skill, and it is a skill, of being almost physically present with each listener, whether he's alone at the mike or talking to a studio guest. He's totally himself, without self-consciousness or artifice, and at the same time he's totally professional.

The former boy wonder of the magazine world (he was managing editor of Maclean's at 28) is still full of enthusiasm and curiosity at 41 and still looks as if he's just come in from a sandlot baseball game. If it's anytime between May and October he probably has.

He's been accused of being cocky, fiercely competitive, a jock, a sentimentalist, and of course a slob. It's probably all true in some degree, along with the alertly brobing mind, the easy laughter, and the openness to people, places and ideas.

Sounds Unlikely

There are two problems about Gzowski on FM in this area. One is that the CBC-FM signal is very difficult to pick up in some parts of Montreal, including Westmount. The other is that it's running against Sounds Unlikely, the local weekday 4 to 6 p.m. series.

Sounds Unlikely, with hosts Wayne Grigsby and Katie Malloch, is a good show too, and contains much more information about what's happening right here — movie reviews, theatre news, and interviews with people who are doing interesting things in and around Montreal.

However, I'm told by those who drive home between 4 and 6 p.m. in the afternoon that the weather reports aren't always what they might be and that traffic reports are often inadequate. I must admit that I haven't listened with those things in mind, but I will from now on.

It's unfortunate that CBC AM and FM should be competing with each other. Surely it would provide better alternatives if each show were scheduled against something quite different, perhaps straight music.

DECISION

Ottawa, November 27, 1975

The Canadian Radio-Television Commission announces the following decision effective forthwith.

Decision CRTC 75-573

MINGAN, QUEBEC — 751043100

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

Application to amend its broadcasting licence for CBGL Mingan, Quebec to change the frequency from 1290 Khz to 740 Khz.

Decision: APPROVED

Guy Lefebvre,
Director-General of Licensing.

Canadian Radio-Television Commission — Conseil de la Radio-Télévision Canadienne

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